

TAIWANESE INDEPENDENCE AND NATIONALISTIC MOVEMENTS*
(1895-1945)

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A. Foreword

During the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, which lasted for fifty years from 1895 to 1945, the nationalistic sentiments of the Taiwanese found frequent, if unsuccessful, expression in various political movements. However, there was singularly little political activity whose goal was Taiwanese independence. In the earliest years of the Japanese occupation, dissident Taiwanese sentiment had as its objective the removal of Japanese overlordship, but the alternative to Japanese rule was envisaged as a Taiwanese government under Chinese suzerainty, not a Taiwanese government independent both of Japan and China. After 1910 Taiwanese dissident groups formulated their programs, not around the idea of winning back Taiwan from the Japanese, but rather around the idea of obtaining more liberal treatment for Taiwan from the Japanese authorities and equitable representation in the Taiwan Government-General. During the entire period of Japanese rule, Taiwanese political movements were under the close observation and control of the Japanese authorities, whose repressive measures resulted in the dissolution of all dissident organizations.

B. Chronological Survey of Nationalistic Movements

For about 12 years after the Japanese gained control of Taiwan in 1895, there was general resistance against the alien rule. 1/ This resistance was unorganized and undirected, and was easily suppressed by the Japanese. 2/ Although there existed during these years among the more intelligent Taiwanese the desire that Taiwan should return to the rule of its mother country, China, 3/ ideological leadership and political organization emerged only toward the end of the first decade of this century. 4/ By 1914, the predominant aim of Taiwanese dissident leaders was a Taiwanese government under the Japanese. 5/

The first conspicuous organization to enunciate the Taiwanese desire for a better status under the Japanese was the Taiwan

* In conformity with current official practice, the name Taiwan has been used in this report in place of the name Formosa, unless Formosa was used in an official English translation.

Assimilation Society (Taiwan Bunka Kai), which was founded by the liberal Japanese statesman, Count ITAGAKI Taisuke. ITAGAKI went to Taiwan and enlisted the support of Taiwanese leaders for his society, the aim of which was to assimilate the Taiwanese with the Japanese. The Japanese authorities feared the effect of ITAGAKI's plan upon the industrial life of Taiwan, and were also fearful that it might foster a communizing movement, and so ordered the society to dissolve in February 1915. 6/

Taiwanese students in schools in Japan early became the most militant promoters of a Taiwanese government under Japan. The first organization of many to be formed by these students was the Taiwan Young Men's Association (also called the Takasago Young Men's Association), which was established in Tokyo in 1915. This group advocated greater freedom for the people of Taiwan. In 1918, another Taiwanese student group in Tokyo, called the Enlightenment Society (Seihatsu Kai), went further in its demands, and called for a reformation of the Japanese administration in Taiwan, especially the abolition of the Governor-General's power of enacting whatever laws he considered necessary for the administration of Taiwan. The society was disbanded in 1919. 7/ LI Yu-pang, wartime propagandist in Chungking, and himself a former student revolutionary, referred to the founding of the Enlightenment Society as the laying of the foundation of the independence movement in Taiwan. 8/

In January 1920 a successor to the Enlightenment Society, the New People's Society (Shin Min Kai), was founded in Tokyo. Inspired by the activities of the Sinn Fein in Ireland, the Society decided to exert pressure on the Japanese government to obtain a congress for Taiwan, and for this purpose established the League for Obtaining a Taiwanese Congress (Taiwan Gikai Kisei Domei Kai). In the spring of 1921, the League presented its first petition for a Taiwanese Congress to the Japanese Diet. The Diet turned down the League's request, and continued to do so annually until 1935, when the League was finally dissolved. 9/ The New People's Society had its own publication, Taiwanese Youth, which was allowed to continue being published after the society was disbanded in 1920. 10/ Later, various elements of the New People's Society established new organizations of varying political color.

The most important offshoot of the defunct New People's Society was the Taiwan Cultural Association (Taiwan Bunka Kai), founded in Taiwan in October 1921. 11/ Its founders were LIH Hsien-t'ang, TS'AI Pei-ho and CHIANG Hui-sui. 12/ The Association's chief concern was with improving the cultural level of

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the Taiwanese, 13/ but it also was active in agricultural co-operatives. It presented several petitions to the Japanese authorities for representative government for the Taiwanese. When one of these petitions, in 1923, was suppressed by the police as rebellious, three of the Association's petitioners went to Tokyo, where the police allowed them to found a magazine in which to advocate and defend their ideals. At the end of 1923 the three petitioners returned to Taiwan, where they were subsequently arrested. Other arrests numbering 49 took place during 1924, as the Japanese authorities were forced to check the continuing development of the representative government movement. 14/

By the middle of the nineteen-twenties, a wave of liberalism resulting from the victory of democratic forces in World War I began to affect the social and labor movements in Japan, and a somewhat more tolerant attitude on the part of the authorities toward Taiwanese nationalistic activities began to be evident. Japanese official policy has been typified by apparent tolerance to what it chooses to call "dangerous thoughts" because this attitude encourages the "dangerous thinkers" to come into the open where they may be more easily controlled. In 1924 the first of Taiwan's farmers' organizations was allowed to be formed, among the plantation workers of a sugar corporation. Its existence was tolerated for 10 months, until the company refusal of the workers' demands resulted in an armed clash. 15/ In 1926 the Taiwan Farmers Union (Taiwan Nomin Kumiai) was organized by farmers dissatisfied with official agricultural policies. It made contact with the Japan Labor-Farmer Party (Nippon Rodo Nomin To) and the Japan Farmers' Union (Nippon Nomin Kumiai), both of which sent representatives to Taiwan to offer advice. The Union was allowed to continue until 1931, at which time the Japanese authorities dissolved it as being fashioned along Communist lines. 16/ At its height, the Union had 23 branch offices throughout Taiwan, four provincial committees and 24,000 members. 17/

In the latter part of the nineteen-twenties (authorities vary in their dates) two other proletarian organizations were founded, along somewhat more Marxist lines. The Taiwan Federation of Labor Unions (Taiwan Koyuuo Renmei), comprising 29 unions, and with a membership of 6,000, was organized with SUN Yat-sen's Three Principles as its basic policy. 18/ Tolerated by the Japanese authorities until the Communist round-up of 1931, the Federation was then suppressed, its members continuing to be treated with suspicion and violence as long as the Japanese were in Taiwan. Closely connected with the Federation was the Taiwan Proletarian Youth Society (Taiwan Muean Seinen Kai), whose Marxist nature caused its early dissolution. 19/

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Early in 1927, the Formosa Cultural Association (founded in 1921) which had concerned itself largely with improvement of the people's culture, was dissolved by the Japanese because of the anti-government speeches of its more radical members. The Association persisted in the form of various successor organizations, most important being a new Cultural Association which encouraged the founding of farmers' and workers' organizations. Two of the groups which it sponsored were the Taiwan Workers' Relief Association and the Taiwan Mechanics' Union. In addition, the new Cultural Association encouraged the unification of small merchants. To achieve its cultural aims, it also established a Social Research Association. These programs appeared too conservative to some of its more radical student members, who organized the Taiwan Political Reformation Association (also called the Taiwanese People's Emancipation Association) in May 1927. The radical character of this new group led to its dissolution by the authorities in June 1927. 20/

In October 1927 the Taiwan Democratic Party (Taiwan Minshu To), also known as the Taiwan Social Democratic Party or the Taiwan People's Party, was established. Comprised in part of members of the defunct Taiwan Political Reformation Association, this new party was regarded by the Japanese authorities as the only organization in the history of their rule of Taiwan to possess the organization, form and ideology of a true political party. In place of racial slogans which would only have led to official suppression, the Taiwan Democratic Party adopted a concrete platform. 21/ Its membership was drawn from all walks of life, and among its leaders were professional and business men who had attended college in the United States. These leaders were continually active through the years in working for some degree of self-government and for abolition of the worst abuses connected with Japanese rule. In February 1931 a general meeting of the party was held at which the following nine-point program was discussed:

1. Political freedom for farm laborers, and protection of the proletariat and others oppressed by arbitrary action of the Governor-General.
2. Protection of the people at large from unfair legislation in which they have no representation, and from oppressive official actions.
3. Opposition to the absolute and despotic rule of the Governor-General, who is responsible to no one in the island. (n.b., the average length of tenure in

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the Governor's office has been two years and one month--too short a time to study local problems, form a program, and carry it into execution.)

4. Opposition to the function of the Advisory Council as not representing the people.
5. People's rights for both sexes over 18 years of age.
6. Improvement of the tax system.
7. Prohibition of opium smoking.
8. Abolition of the opium monopoly.
9. Various social improvements.

The party previously had strongly criticized the government, asserting that the Musha Rebellion of the aborigines in 1930 was an example of the results of non-representative government. It also had published a pamphlet on the oppressive land policies of the government. With regard to the opium question, it had maintained that aside from the fact of government monopoly, the figures of addiction and cure had been juggled to hide official encouragement of the opium habit, and government profits had increased enormously. Furthermore, the party had even dared to appeal directly to the League of Nations on the opium issue, without official permission. As a result of these activities and the open denunciation of the nine-point platform, the Taiwan Democratic Party was disbanded, and 16 of its members arrested. At the time of its dissolution, the party had 17 branches and a membership of 300. 22/

In 1930, conservative elements in the Taiwan Democratic Party founded a Taiwan Self-Governing League, which took its stand on the sole issue of local government. Its purpose was legal, and its method of pursuing its aim was to persuade Japanese officials in Taiwan to negotiate with the Tokyo government for authority to make changes in the local government of Taiwan. As a result of the League's efforts, reforms were achieved in city, town and village assemblies. The League, which had been allowed by the authorities to exist after the suppression of its parent organization, is the only example of a Taiwanese political group which got along harmoniously with the Japanese authorities, accomplished its purpose, and thereupon disbanded voluntarily. 23/

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In 1931 the militarists and ultra-nationalists came into power in Japan. After the assassination of Prime Minister INUKAI, the campaign against "dangerous thoughts" got into full swing. Taiwan was included in the general repressive policy, and by the end of 1931 all liberal organizations in Taiwan had been suppressed. ^{24/} Thereafter, all nationalistic activity was carried on by secret underground groups in Taiwan, or by organizations of Taiwanese abroad. For a decade sporadic revolts occurred, chief of which was the conspiracy of the Friends of the Masses Society (Shayukai), a secret organization with headquarters in Taiko-gun, Taiko Province. This group had carried on the secret manufacture of rifles and ammunition. In September 1934, enlisting the aid of its various branches throughout Taiwan, the Society engaged in an abortive rebellion against the Japanese authorities. Discovery of the plot, its suppression and drastic punishment were kept secret by the police for more than two years. Over 400 persons were tried for conspiracy, the majority of whom were uneducated and between 30 and 40 years of age. ^{25/} The harsh treatment accorded this group of conspirators resulted in the complete disheartenment of the nationalistic movement in Taiwan. ^{26/} Subsequent attempts at rebellion, which became periodic after the outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities in 1937 and the consequent attempt of the Japanese authorities to conscript Taiwanese for the war, were neither large-scale nor too difficult for the authorities to subdue. Propaganda emanating from Taiwanese independence spokesmen in Chungking during World War II has tended to give a highly colored picture of nationalistic subversion both before and during the war. ^{27/}

The suppressive policies of the Japanese in 1931 led a number of dissident Taiwanese to begin organizing politically abroad. In 1931 the Taiwan Youth Party, which had been suppressed in Taiwan, was reorganized in Shanghai, later taking on the name of Anti-Imperialist League. In the same year the Taiwan Revolutionary League was founded in China. These and other minor Taiwanese groups abroad, mostly comprising intellectuals, became more active after the start of Sino-Japanese hostilities in 1937. In 1940 they were all united into one group, the Federation of Formosan Revolutionists, with representation in Chungking. The Federation's aims were:

1. To disorganize Taiwan's production and communications, vital to Japan's strong military and naval bases on the island.
2. To strengthen anti-Japanese guerrilla forces operating in Taiwan.

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3. To organize groups of volunteers for war with Japan in China.
4. To organize strikes of workers, municipal personnel and students in Taiwan.
5. To spread anti-war and anti-Fascist propaganda.
6. To unite all Taiwanese revolutionary organizations.

The Federation's organ paper was the Formosan Vanguard. 28/
A wartime propaganda magazine, China at War, published in English in Chungking, had this to say in its August 1940 issue concerning the Federation:

The Formosan revolution if more effectively pushed in Formosa will no doubt deal a serious blow to the moves of the Japanese imperialists. Primarily this is the aim of the Federation. Since the outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities, Formosan revolutionists have started uprisings in Formosa and carried out sabotage and disturbances. In China, Formosans have participated in the resistance of their fatherland, have fought at the front as volunteers, and have helped in the rear. It will be the objective of the Federation to enlarge participation in China's resistance against Japan. The resistance of China and the Formosan revolution are two aspects of the same cause which cannot be separated.

The same article lists the following three aims of the Federation's manifesto:

1. To support the Three People's Principles and the policy of resistance and reconstruction of China and obey her Supreme Leader, Generalissimo CHIANG Kai-shek.
2. To consolidate all revolutionary forces of Formosa to overthrow the Japanese rule in Formosa and restore freedom of the Formosan people.
3. To mobilize the Formosan masses for the revolution and enlarge the participation by Formosan volunteers to cast the Japanese from China. 29/

At the end of the war in 1945, the Federation of Formosan Revolutionists was still in existence in China, and reportedly had active contacts in Taiwan. 30/

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C. Taiwanese Communist Activities

Communist activity among the Taiwanese dates back to the period of postwar liberalism in the middle nineteen-twenties. The first Taiwanese Communist organization, founded in Shanghai in 1927, took the form of a front group called the Shanghai Taiwanese Students Federation. Its founders, the two Taiwanese LIN Ma-shun and HSIEH Hsueh-hung, had studied in Moscow and had been ordered by the Comintern to form an initial Taiwanese group under the direction of the Shanghai representative of the Japan Communist Party (JCP). ^{11/} The Federation advocated democratic revolution by proletarian farmers against Japanese imperialism, with the objective of obtaining independence for Taiwan. It hoped to infiltrate the Taiwan Farmers' Union and the new Cultural Association to unify these two organizations into a Communist Party for the masses. ^{12/} In January 1928, LIN and HSIEH were ordered by the JCP to reorganize their group into the Taiwan Branch of the JCP, and to seek the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in their reorganization. The latter part of this order probably reflected the inability of the JCP itself to assume the responsibility, under the strict police surveillance and internal discussion it was then encountering. The reorganization took place under the aegis of the CCP, although the reorganizational meetings were attended by representatives of the JCP and the Korean Communist Party, who served as advisors along with members of the CCP.

The reorganization resulted in the establishment in April 1928 of a Taiwan Central Committee in Taiwan. The Committee decided to set up organizational, propaganda, youth and women's departments, as well as two branch offices, in Shanghai and Tokyo, to maintain liaison with the CCP and the JCP. Upon completion of this reorganization, the Taiwanese group reverted to JCP control. However, the serious weakening of the JCP through the anti-Communist round-ups of 1928 forced the Taiwanese Communists to fall back on their own resources, and they turned again for aid to the CCP and to the Far Eastern Branch of the Comintern. In 1930, another reorganization took place, under the sponsorship of the Comintern, but somewhat later the Taiwanese Communists were transferred to the jurisdiction of the CCP.

The Taiwanese Communist organization was never an effective subversive instrument in Taiwan, and did little to bolster Taiwanese resistance against Japan for the following reasons: (1) it was a prime target for Japanese countersubversive activity; (2) its leadership was constantly torn by factional strife between proponents of CCP and JCP supervision; and (3) it suffered neglect

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on the part of the CCP, which was then engaged in its own life and death struggle with the National Government of China. From the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 to the end of World War II the Taiwanese Communist group remained dormant. 11/ Although the Taiwanese Communists* had been strong advocates of Taiwanese independence from Japan, as soon as the war was over the Communist plan for Taiwan became union with China under the Communists.

* Among the Taiwanese Communists surviving from pre-war days, LIN Ma-shun and HSIEN Hsueh-hung, the original founders of the Taiwanese Communist group, have been reported active in post-war years. LIN was reported in 1951 to be a Chinese Communist intelligence agent in Hong Kong. 14/ and HSIEN was still active in 1954 in the Chinese Communist regime in Peking. 15/



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